

**Linda Clair**  
**Seven-day Meditation Retreat**  
**Kallara Conference Centre, Australia**  
**30 November – 7 December 2019**  
**Transcription from Audio Recordings**

**File 4b – Tuesday morning discussion session**

Linda: Any good stories? 😊

Question: It's not a story but I thought it might be interesting for others because in most retreats people always ask, "How do I manage to practice when I'm not here? In between retreat, what do I do?" And even in retreats, "How long should I sit? How should I do this and that? Is that long enough? Am I dedicated enough?" and all this sort of stuff. (Laughter) You hear it all the time. I thought it would be interesting or useful to share my experience of managing my practice this year because it was a very haphazard year. I had to travel a lot. I missed a lot of retreats. In between I didn't have time to sit. I had 14-hour workdays and the last thing you want to do is sit. Just thinking back now how I managed this. I did these odd retreats here and there but overall it was very haphazard. I didn't feel like I was getting anywhere; I felt like I was treading water. It was quite difficult but in the end it was about getting back into it. I kept it alive in the day-to-day and odd opportunities – every opportunity. For example, sitting on the plane, waiting for a storm, I took that time to sit, to meditate. On a short flight in the middle seat, I sat up straight and closed my eyes and did not move. Or jet lag – you wake up in the middle of the night and you don't want to get up and do a sit but I just lay there for an hour and followed the breathing. That's how I kept it going. I feel I was still at least once a day.

In the retreats – and how long to sit and how to manage the pain – I just played it by ear. I felt like I needed to manage this – how do I get into it – I couldn't just walk in and sit for three hours. So it was all about planning: doing this and measuring that, and doing this much this morning, and do the walking, and the retreat in Oxford and Newbury. And it's about being flexible and playing around with it. Sometimes I sit on the chair. There's a lot of opportunity to move things around. Now, after the five-day in Newbury and two weeks later coming here – now, I'm getting back to where I was 12 months ago by gradually getting into it rather than, "I've got to sit. I've got to sit. I've got to do this." By letting it build up gradually it was a productive process. Now I feel like I'm back in it. I manage the pain. And now I've got the energy coming back which I haven't had all year. Now I feel again motivated to do it. Now I can see the way forward. Now I have the opportunity to do it was well... But I forgot the point to the story. (Laughter)

Linda: Well, there doesn't need to be a point. It's just good hearing someone's experience and how they feel about the whole thing.

Question: The point of the story is to really do it. To make progress you have to put the effort in: you have to sit, you have to do it. You can't just lounge around and hope it will happen one day. You have to do the work. If you don't have the opportunity, there's flexibility. You can play around with it. I feel I've done that for the last 12 months without losing it. Although often I was wondering about motivation.

Linda: So you're motivated again now. You're going to go home and sit.

Question: Yes, that's the plan. I knew that from the beginning the year, getting back into a disciplined practice around sitting

Linda: The travel is difficult but as you say not impossible. I wish more people sat still. 😊  
(Laughing)

Question: And apart from formal sits, use the practice in your day-to-day life and your work. Like when I do feedback and coaching with people, it's about being in the moment and being there – it's amazing the kind of things that happen – rather than thinking ahead and planning a session and forcing a structure on it. I've only been able to do that through this practice and it has been a really rewarding experience how that has built up over the year with some amazing feedback sessions with people. There you go, enough about me. 😊 (Laughter)

Linda: Thanks. Anyone else what to share what's going on?

Question: Perhaps there's some value in talking about the last year that I've had which has perhaps been the most challenging in my life. I had a series of things happen to my spine which I could work to heal with yoga. Then I had compression fractures in vertebra and there was nothing I could do about them. But the amazing thing that I'm certain is due to my sitting with Linda was that there was never a moment when I resented. It was just – this is what is, and just being with that. I couldn't sit and was told by physio to spend most of my time lying, a bit walking and absolute minimum sitting. I tried meditating lying down but all I could do was be with the pain – I guess that was meditation. And the pain relief that I was given either didn't touch it or within a week had horrific side effects and was better off being with what is. Eventually I could begin to move but I needed time to do even simple practices with my body and be totally present there. What's been interesting is, as the pain got less, how much awareness of moment-to-moment-thinking and awareness of how many unpleasant aspects of myself I could see, that I trust weren't expressed but were absolutely there in my face. Slowly I'm beginning not to have to make top priority on little movements of my body just to begin to get it back to some form that I can recognize and use. It's interesting that there's been a bit a big effect on my capacity to think and my memory. Maybe it will come back; maybe it won't.

Linda: What, you can't think as much? (Yes.) That's good.

Question: But there are times when I need to think.

Linda: When? When do you need to think? Give me an example, right now.

Question: I can't think. (Laughter) There were times when I knew I needed to ask somebody something but what I needed to ask them was simply not available. I've always been pretty independent and I was blessed in one way – I could just manage to keep teaching my yoga students with a number of hot-water bottles around me to manage the discomfort. I couldn't find presence for myself but I could find that for my students. And they asked what they could do so I could manage to keep teaching. They cooked for me and did things. I've been challenged by having to ask people for things. Eventually I was able to go sit with other students. D. used to carry my things up to the car for me. It's been quite an extraordinary year for me, so immense gratitude for the years of practice I've had with you.

And a question. For five to ten minutes a couple of times when I didn't have pain and then my knees and bum started hurting and the thought came, "Oh, this is real pain!" So, is there some way that this pain we get from sitting is more real than physical pain?

Linda: Maybe. But what you're doing is looking for a way to make it more real. I'd say, don't question it. Don't try and figure out whether this is physical pain or non-physical pain or energetic pain. Don't question it, just accept it. If you try and figure out what it is...

Question: It wasn't a figuring out. It was just a thought and then the thought was gone. I was astonished by it.

Linda: In a sense, no pain is real but it feels very real. And a huge percentage of most pain that most people feel – I'm not saying you don't feel any pain when you're in the body, of course you do – but a huge percentage of the suffering from that pain is fear – an emotional reaction to it. So whether it's more real – I wouldn't call any pain real. It's just – pain is pain. So trying to say this pain is more real than this pain, there's no point.

Question: Mostly through this year there hasn't been thinking about the pain, I've just been with it. There hasn't been space for anything else. And it's great to be back, at least managing to do a bit more sitting. Thank you.

Linda: Thanks.

Question: Following from the previous question – maybe it's an analysis on my behalf – we're taught that pain lets us know that something's wrong. So we're challenging it by doing this practice. But is there a point where we should listen to it?

Linda: It's different when you're sitting. The pain that you feel when you're sitting is usually quite different. Often you can feel some really intense pain and then you open your eyes – you don't even move – and suddenly it's gone. It's what I was saying to A. before, when you're sitting there and going, "Is it physical pain or is it pain from this?" – I don't know if there's a point.

Occasionally I suppose some people might get some sort of injury from sitting for a long time, but usually no. I think M. had something wrong with her foot last retreat from sitting but she was sitting for 3-4 hours at a time. She did have a slight injury from that but most of the time you're not going to injure yourself sitting for an hour. But it can feel like you are. Part of you is scared because you go, "Ah, this isn't right. I'm injuring my body." If you go and talk to someone about it they'll probably say, no, it's not a good thing to sit here for hours in the same position, physically it's not that great for your body. My body feels fine from it. It might be a bit hard on your knees at times. But all-in-all it makes you much more aware of your body. So it's hard to say. Most of the time, if you're just sitting for an hour and you're in the right position, you're not going to damage your body.

Question: Sometimes I've had a neck injury and various things and I sometimes think, "If I'm not sitting in the right place, it might trigger the whiplash again." So I sometimes think, "Should I ride this out?" because it has sometimes. Sometimes I've experimented; I get up at the end of the sit and I feel fine! (Laughing) I go for a walk and I'm alright.

Linda: Yes, you need to experiment yourself like that and show yourself what's going on. If you have got a physical weakness somewhere, it is going to intensify it when you're sitting. Part of that intensity is going to be fear – part of it is just simply that physical weakness in whatever part of your body – but a big part of it is fear.

Question: You said at one of the retreats this year that death is the ultimate detachment.

Linda: I don't think I would have said that. I can't say for sure. I'd say the ultimate unknown. I can't rely on my memory but usually I know what I haven't said.

Question: Maybe what you *didn't* say made me think. I've been reflecting on what I'm attached to and whether I need to wait until I die to become detached from it. I've found that everything that I like in my life, I'm attached to. It can be big things like having children, or small things like having a hot shower in the morning. The only things I'm not attached to are the things I don't like, like traffic jams. It wouldn't be a blow if they went away.

Linda: But in a way you are attached to them because you're attached to not liking them. That's a different sort of thing. It's still an attachment, but it's an attachment to a preference.

Of course a hot shower is nice – I like hot showers, but if I don't get one now it's not such a big deal, whereas before it was. But the same with traffic jams – I don't like them but there's not this, "Oh, I hate traffic jams!" So there's not this love/hate anymore. So even the things that you don't like, there can be an attachment. It was funny, when I went to Adelaide I almost missed the traffic jams, "This is almost too easy." So maybe there was some attachment there.

Question: But as a result of this process of thinking about attachment and detachment I found myself wanting to let go of things. So I'm starting a process of de-cluttering the house – which is rather tidy already but – I don't need thirty tea towels, maybe eight will do. And I started having one minute of a cold shower after my hot shower. Also a few weeks ago I decided I'm not going to eat meat anymore. My question revolves around: what is the process of becoming detached from things? Is it something you can practice, to the point of going to live in a hut wearing a hair shirt? Is that a way to practice, or will it develop on its own? Is it a gradual process, or does it happen mostly when you become enlightened?

Linda: No, I feel it's a gradual thing. It's everything you've said. So it starts to happen naturally, like it is with you, where you're looking at things and doing practical things like that, challenge your attachment to things. It's not like you need to go to an extreme, most people don't need to do that. I think doing this and practicing this in your daily life is extreme enough. But doing little things like that, and big things – things that you've always just taken for granted and been attached to without even questioning – it's great to do that, to look at things like that and change them around. And really watch your attachment and your habitual behaviour around things, and change it. I used to do the same thing. It is going to help. It's part of it. So it develops gradually, and you start to want to look at every attachment that you've got. What it comes down to is the thinking. The only way really you can see how attached to something you are is to remove it from your life and see what sort of attachment there is. You can talk about it but it's actual practice that shows you. So I'd say keep doing things like that but don't make it too extreme. Don't feel you have to go and live in a cave with a hair shirt.

Question: A friend of mine died a few years ago of cancer. She had cancer for ten years. They are the type of experiences that can be really transformative. Over the course of the ten years she really recalibrated what mattered in her life. At the end she looked like she was dying in peace, but the one thing she was heartbroken about was her kids – they were nineteen and twenty-two. The younger one, she felt was very sensitive and she was heartbroken that she wouldn't be there in his time of need. That's the sort of attachment that I don't know if you can ever let go of that. Can you?

Linda: I don't know. Well, probably, to a degree. I can't say I'm not attached to my kids at all. I think as long as you're in the body there's some attachment. It's only when you're dying that you

would see every residual attachment. The thing is, none of us are indispensable. That's what you start to realise –things will go on without you, you're not indispensable.

Question: For me there's fear giving up things or detaching because there are things that seem to give meaning and joy and some happiness. If you take those things you're attached to, it feels like it's going to feel meaningless and without purpose and empty.

Linda: You go through a period where it can feel a bit like that. Let things fall away naturally. That's what will happen. You'll suddenly realise you're not as interested in something that you were incredibly interested a while ago and go, "Oh, I don't care about that anymore." It can feel a bit strange at times, but eventually after that transition period something else kicks in that's much, much deeper. It's not that you don't enjoy being in the world. Once you get all this out of the way you do, most of the time, but there's not that looking for meaning outside of yourself with anything – your family, possessions, anything. But it doesn't mean that you don't enjoy having a few possessions and family. So it all comes into balance again at the end. But a lot of things change on the way.

I can just reassure you that the emptiness that people talk about is this amazing, beautiful, fullness of emptiness. It's not this cold empty place. But at times during this practice it can feel a bit like that. And that emptiness gets filled up with this incredible love. Not just your own children or family – but everyone. It's not like you target people close to you so much anymore, it's just this general love. You can be walking down the street and look at someone you've never seen before and feel this incredible love for them, and they're nothing do with you personally, it's just human beings.

Sometimes when I'm sitting on a plane and I see everyone sitting there, and all their little heads, it's like, "Ah, there's all these human beings in this box, hurtling through the air." It's so beautiful. We're all doing this together. It doesn't end up cold and empty, but on the way there can be a bit of that feeling at times.

And also, what I found is that my idea, "Oh, I like this sort of person or this sort of person and not this sort of person," or anything to do with anything: colours, people, food, anything – you become suddenly much more open. You don't have this fixed view of anything anymore. You just become completely open to anything, to anyone. You don't judge people by how they look.

Question: Do people start seeing you as a vegetable, happy with anything.

Linda: I didn't say I was happy with everything.

Question: But because you don't have strong opinions.

Linda: Maybe they do but I don't care. I don't care how people see me anymore. That's the thing. And that changes your behaviour because you're not trying to please people or seek out affirmation or love from anyone. You don't even consider it. It's not even that you don't care; you don't consider that anymore. Your behaviour becomes completely authentic because you're not trying to please anyone, so it's completely different.